

Belmont Warrant Committee Meeting Minutes
FINAL
February 24, 2010, 7:30 p.m.
Chenery Middle School Community Room

Present: Chair Curtis; Members Allison, Becker, Brusch, Callanan, Dash, Epstein, Libenson, Lynch, Manjikian, McLaughlin, Millane, Paolillo, Smith; BOS Chair Leclerc; School Committee Chair Rittenburg

Town Administrator Younger and Town Accountant Hagg

Members Absent: Hofmann

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 pm by Chair Curtis.

Chair Curtis began the meeting by turning to the Town Clerk salary. He said that the WC will want to form a rational basis for the salary number. The salary will be recommended to Mr. Younger and then to TM.

Discussion of Basis for Town Clerk Salary

Member Epstein collected Town Clerk salaries statewide as well as Clerk job descriptions from nearby communities. The range in similar-sized towns close to Belmont was \$60-65K. The job duties were similar across the Board, he said, and some Clerks are elected while some are appointed. Member Millane said that the General Government sub-committee is recommending \$60K as a base salary and a \$3K stipend for registrar duties. Most WC members agreed to pick one number and whoever gets elected gets that salary. The WC discussed step increases and the history of step increases for this position. Mr. Younger said he would work this salary number into the budget.

Member Brusch moved: That the WC support the sub-committee recommendation of a \$60K salary plus a \$3K registrar duty stipend.
The motion passed with 15 voting in favor and one member opposed.

Continuation of Structural Change Discussion

Chair Curtis noted that Member Libenson has started a spreadsheet in which each structural change suggestion will have a note indicating what would be required to implement it, as well as a note regarding potential savings (high/med/low). The WC discussed the amounts that would denote high/med/low savings. After a discussion, it was decided that a savings under \$25K would be low, a \$25-100K savings would be medium, and a savings over a \$100K would be high.

Members Allison and Libenson will work through the proposals to create the master spreadsheet. Member Allison suggested that each sub-committee may want to tackle the suggestions that fall in its purview, and that the WC could divvy up the “all town” suggestions.

The suggestions from the Message Box at the Citizen Herald will be forwarded to Member Libenson. It was agreed that, if numerous suggestions come in (as hoped), their analysis will be shared among WC members. Member Paolillo asked about having suggestions on the town and school websites. Mr. Younger said suggestions could be gathered there and sent to the WC. Chair Curtis read some of the suggestions from the Citizen Herald.

Reports on Subcommittee Progress

Chair Curtis posed the following questions to the sub-committees:

- What are the programs you are analyzing?
- What additional resources do you need?
- What is your schedule for analyzing?
- When will you be ready to present a report?

Curtis asked BOS Chair Leclerc about the BOS’s thoughts on an override ballot initiative. Leclerc noted that an override was discussed at the recent Board meeting, as it was felt that the town can no longer sustain reasonable services without an override. The Board would like to maintain level services, but the exact number is not yet clear. As for timing, the Board is thinking May or June. The Board mentioned types of overrides, and it also decided to form a committee to look at the consolidation of HR, legal, and building facilities in order to move forward in these areas.

Chair Curtis noted that if an override were scheduled for May 10th, the Board would need to vote by March 10th. The WC can help inform how much the override should be and how to tier it, he continued, but this requires an analysis of programs that are in the budget. We have the month of March to figure this budget out, with sub-committee reports due on the 24th and 31st. Member Paolillo stated that local aid numbers will not be known when this override is voted on. How can we be prepared to move forward on May 10th with state aid not known? Member Lynch asked if the town and school would have created level service and/or available revenue budgets? Member Bruschi replied that three budgets (as defined by the WC) can be requested and presented to TM.

Chair Curtis said that the WC wants to understand the budget programmatically, so as to help us to decide what to eliminate (rather than, for example, simply chopping off a flat 12%). He noted that, by law, the WC must present a balanced budget to TM. This, by definition, is an “available revenue” budget. The alternative is to give the town and school an available budget number and ask them to come back to us with a budget. That budget might be a programmatic budget, but would not necessarily be.

The WC discussed potential budget scenarios and budget timing as well as override scenarios and timelines.

Member McLaughlin wondered whether the WC is ready to deal with programmatic budgets for this year. Member Callanan noted that a successful override must go hand in hand with structural and programmatic changes. Member Millane noted that General Government is a difficult area to break down with programs. SC Chair Rittenburg said that the WC had agreed to a June time-line trajectory (which the school department is preparing for), why switch to May, she asked? Rittenburg added that the School Committee will complete its needs-based budget by March 23rd. Member McLaughlin reminded the WC that an override will require not only time to sell it and time-frame it – but also time to react if it is not passed. Member Bruschi suggested presenting two budgets at TM: one with an override and one if an override does not pass.

The WC continued to discuss potential budget and override scenarios and timelines.

Member Smith noted that, in order to create an available revenue budget for town and school, the available revenue will need to be split. Or, Chair Curtis replied, the programmatic approach could be used. Member McLaughlin suggested using the historic split to generate the numbers and go from there. Curtis said it is too early to formulate available revenue budgets. Now is the time to analyze the budget programmatically – and we will do so by March 31st, he said.

General Government, said Member Millane, is meeting this week and next week. We hope to have report drafts by the second week of March and to report to the WC by end or third week in March.

Public Safety, said Member Paolillo, is currently looking at major programs and trying to see the money allocation. We have a framework for discussion and have meetings scheduled for both departments.

Public Works, said Member Epstein, begins its meetings tomorrow. We hope to have a report in early March, but it is a vast undertaking.

Culture and Recreation, said Member Lynch, hopes to be ready by the end of March, with meetings beginning next week.

Education, said Member Allison, will begin with a review of the school's budget book, and the first meeting is scheduled for March 3. Possible topics for discussion include linking the high-level "mission statement" objectives to budget numbers, the set of proposed additions, and the fact that the budget format is similar to previous years and not in a "program budgeting" format used by school departments elsewhere. The sub-committee will attend the school department's March 6th budget meeting.

Minutes

The minutes of 2/3 and 2/11 were postponed until next week.

Other

Next week the WC will continue with the structural suggestions conversation and perhaps allow time for the sub-committees to convene.

Member McLaughlin moved to adjourn at 9:30 pm.

Submitted by Lisa Gibalerio
WC Recording Secretary